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The Teaching Church - Active in Mission

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Margaret R. Miles, Harvard Divinity School, in a provocative article on early North African Christianity, shows how "patriarchal order was not, as we have come to think of it, inevitable, God-ordained, and scripturally based" but the gradual ecclesiastical subordination of women "who experienced the freedom of Christ specifically as freedom for the cultivation of a lifestyle and spiritual life undefined by males" (184). Finally, Black theologian James H. Cone characterizes Black religious thought in America as a distinct amalgam of both African and Christian religion "adapted to the life situation of black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology" (87).

The main problem of the book is also its strength: the diversity of viewpoints. There is no one clear concept of what "civil religion" is, let alone what constitutes the nature of religion. Neither is there one view of political theology. About the only general consensus amongst the authors appears to be, as the editor puts it, "that religion must be relevant to political life without being co-opted by it" (2). Despite this, and the fact that a number of the essays do not directly address the topic of the book, this is an excellent introduction not only to some of the best sociologists of religion and theologians of today but also to the basic issues in the debate between civil religionists and political theologians.

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The Teaching Church—Active in Mission

Paul D. and Katherine A. Gehris

Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press

98 pp.

This book is one of a series of books on The Teaching Church published by Judson Press. The series deals with five "functions" of a teaching church: 1. affirming the foundations of the teaching ministry; 2. planning for an effective teaching ministry; 3. developing leaders for a variety of ministries; 4. nurturing persons in Christian growth; and 5. enabling the church's mission in the world. The term "missioner" is introduced as "persons who are actively engaged in mission, beginning where they are and continuing to the far corners of creation" (5).

The title caught my attention and I picked the book up eagerly but found it was difficult for me to read. Upon the third reading it began to make sense and I realized that it is intended to be a book for study and discussion by people who are interested in enabling the church's mission in the world. People who wish to develop education for mission will find it

a helpful book to study. It is packed full of concepts and principles which provide seed thoughts for discussion by interested people and are basic for implementing the practical guides to enable education for mission.

Set in historical perspective the church is seen to be the whole people of God. "The role of the church is to make the announcement of the Good News and the implications of the Good News, and to challenge itself and the world to hear and heed the message" (12). The culture of the people in each place needs to be taken into account by missionaries. The uniqueness of the church is not seen in special privilege but in willingness to serve (14).

The mission of the church is seen as multifaceted, concerned with body, mind and soul. "The task of mission is not to weigh down but to 'free up'—to liberate—apart from culture, money, theology, or practice" (15). Mission embodies the Good News of the gospel and speaks the Good News in deed and words. It strives to bring wholeness, relationship, and self-respect. Mission meets people where they are and goes with them where they need to go.

Missionaries who are specially called and set aside to do mission are needed but all people who have heard and take seriously the Good News are missionaries. Missioners are church folk who are doing mission intentionally. Such people are needed so that the whole church is sharing the Good News of creation and life made new through Jesus Christ. The laity are the body of the church and they need to be intentional and focused—disciplined missionaries (17).

The mission of the church is best accomplished when personal involvement and institutional goals are integrated. When local congregations are involved in setting the mission goals of their denomination they feel ownership of these goals and participate willingly in working toward their implementation. When church members see themselves as part of a team rather than "loners" the church's mission will be successful. Denominations, churches, and church agencies need to be open and inclusive and model interdependence (17).

Chapter 2 looks at the educational process and the ways churches can educate people to be missionaries. It makes suggestions for each stage of human development. The mission educational goal of the church is to instill in each person a sense of history, unity, and vision. In ways that each age level can comprehend, there needs to be an understanding of the local, national and world mission involvement of the church and the denomination (23).

In order to be the church in corporate mission, the people and the congregation need to know who they are, including their history and their hope. The Christian imperatives of sharing the Good News and helping those in need can be honored without selling out heritage or future. There is also the imperative to do good for those in need based on a common humanity. The Christian imperative drives us to cooperative Christian and interfaith action. It is helpful to remember that many of our members are

already involved in mission outside of the church in both their work and volunteer activities.

Planning unifies efforts and vision and enables mission. The planning process suggested in chapter 6 looks quite workable. It is important that a broad base of members affirms the principle of planning and engages in the process of planning. "The plan needs to be reasonable and the work doable but not so simple as to lack in challenge or so difficult as to be overwhelming" (75).

The study guide works through the book chapter by chapter with a plan for study and action. It looks to be a very workable plan. Other resources for further study are listed.

I see this book as a useful resource for people interested in strengthening their congregation for mission.

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When You Are Angry With God

Pat McCloskey

New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987.

One of the burning issues for the Christian church is the problem of suffering. How does the Christian community respond to experiences of human suffering? It is the author's thesis that one's view of God has a profound effect on how persons cope with or respond to difficult life experiences. He notes that in his ministry as a confessor there are a lot of people who are "heavily burdened by anger at God, or more precisely, by anger at what they interpreted as 'God's will' " (2). He observes that people are often reluctant to identify their anger and then to deal with it. They fear that being angry at God may lead to non-faith.

The purpose of the book is not to provide easy answers but it seeks to identify some basic questions about innocent human suffering and the feelings of anger at God. It invites the reader to go on a personal journey and to make a personal investment.

In his opening chapter, "Life Isn't Fair," McCloskey examines a variety of human problems which defy easy answers. What about the innocent victims of war, hatred, family violence or physical illness? Can we ascribe these events to God's will? Hardly! When people see suffering as being God's will then anger is an inevitable result. Anger must be recognized and voiced even when directed at God. His response to the question of human suffering is summed up in one sentence, "Much—I believe most—of human suffering can be traced to an abuse of human freedom" (18).

What are the sources for the various views on human suffering? The author identifies and traces four views in the Old Testament: Genesis—suffering is closely linked to sin; Exodus—hints of the innocent suffering as